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SUBJECT: DFM ABBAWI DISCUSSES ISTANBUL, PKK, AND IRAN

Classified By: POL-MIL MINISTER-COUNSELOR MARCIE B. RIES, REASONS 1.4(B)
) AND (D)

¶1. (S) SUMMARY: Pol-Mil M/C called on Deputy Foreign Minister Abbawi November 6 to discuss his impressions of the Istanbul Neighbors Ministerial, progress on dealing with the PKK, and setting up trilateral talks with Iran. Abbawi was pleased with Istanbul and praised Turkish cooperation at the ministerial. He assessed that tensions with Turkey regarding the PKK had been lowered and that the next step was regularizing Kurdish participation in dialogue with Turkey. Abbawi agreed to propose a second round of trilateral talks with Iran at the sub-ambassadorial level for late November. Syrian officials told him that they were ready to open their side of the border at Al Qaim but were not likely to participate in the ceremony. Abbawi concluded by raising the Saudi failure to participate in the Border Security Working Group Technical Experts meeting in Kuwait. END SUMMARY.

ISTANBUL: ATMOSPHERE, TURKISH ATTITUDE POSITIVE

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¶2. (S) Pol-Mil Minister Counselor called on Deputy Foreign Minister Labeed Abbawi November 6. Abbawi was very positive regarding the atmosphere at the Neighbors Ministerial in Istanbul, regarding it as a step forward from the first ministerial at Sharm el Sheikh. He regarded the final communiqu? as a good document and appreciated the &very good& cooperation from the Turks in accepting the many changes requested by the GOI. By contrast, he regarded the Syrian interventions (&the same old rhetoric&) as problematic. Abbawi described the Iranian &plan& for Iraq as &very provocative&, like a big brother telling Iraq what to do.

PKK ISSUE ON THE RIGHT TRACK

¶3. (S) Abbawi assessed that discussions at Istanbul had defused tensions with Turkey regarding the PKK to some degree and that the GOI had managed to send a message to the Turkish public that Iraq was cooperating with Turkey regarding the PKK, countering the negative press Iraq had been getting. While Turkey might yet &do something& up north in the mountains, Abbawi thought that more extensive Turkish military action might have been averted. The GOI agreed with Secretary Rice's view expressed at the trilateral that the

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three governments needed to think strategically about how to tackle the problem. Maintaining the positive atmosphere generated at Istanbul would allow dialogue on the PKK to continue. Getting Turkey to routinely accept Kurdish representation within GOI delegations would be a key next step. The Kurds must understand that they cannot ease up on

the PKK, but ultimately a solution will require the PKK to lay down their arms in exchange for amnesty from Turkey. There is significant sympathy for the PKK throughout Kurdistan, although it is not always expressed around outsiders, noted Abbawi. He related an anecdote about a shop clerk selling a PKK flag literally under the table when Abbawi was in Kurdistan with a visiting with a group of foreign dignitaries.

¶ 14. (S) Pol-Mil M/C praised the GOI for taking an assertive role, pursuing diplomacy, and encouraging concrete actions by the KRG. This was likely a fundamental advance from a Turkish perspective, as was KRG willingness to take specific measures. Continued visible actions against the PKK will be necessary to enable the Turks to continue on the path of diplomacy. Pol-Mil M/C notified Abbawi that approximately 200 Interpol red notices had been issued for PKK operatives, and that we would be passing these to the GOI. It would be very important for the Turks to see arrests of PKK officials.

While we did not yet have a lengthy readout from PM Erdogan's meeting with the President, Turkey seemed to be pleased that the U.S. had declared the PKK to be our problem, not just theirs. Though Turkey has been bringing up the perceived failure of the previous trilateral process regarding the PKK, we will need to move forward with trilateral efforts to reach a solution, concluded Pol-Mil M/C.

TRILATERAL WITH IRAN

¶ 15. (S) Abbawi explained that Iranian Ambassador Ghomi's statement that Iran was waiting for a note from the U.S. through the Swiss channel conflicted with public statements that Iran was ready for further trilateral talks whenever the Iraqis set a date. Abbawi agreed that the talks should take place between November 20-30 and indicated that he would

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follow up with the Iranians. Pol-Mil M/C explained that the next round would be at the sub-ambassadorial level and that she would lead the U.S. delegation as at the first round of the trilateral security subcommittee on August 6. She predicted that the parties would be able to engage in a more substantive way than in the first round since the format had now been established.

¶ 16. (S) Pol-Mil M/C told Abbawi that there were some indications the Iranians were abiding by their commitment to PM Maliki to cease provision of weapons and support to illegal militias in Iraq. The U.S. had found large caches of explosively-formed penetrators (EFPs) in recent weeks, and would publicize these finds, but we would also state our belief that they had been sent to Iraq prior to Iran's commitment to a cessation of weapons-smuggling. Our most serious concern was Iranian lethal aid which was still killing our soldiers. If these shipments stopped, this would be a major advance. Abbawi confided that he had spoken to PM Maliki about this matter, and they assessed that the Iranians now realized they couldn't use the militias or the Sadrists to control Iraq. Sadr is not Nasrallah and JAM is not Lebanese Hezbollah, concluded Abbawi.

AL QAIM REOPENING

¶ 17. (C) Abbawi explained that he had raised the November 15 reopening of the Al Qaim border crossing with the Syrians at Istanbul. They said they were ready to reopen their side, but they did not respond substantively to his invitation to take part in the reopening ceremony. He said he would follow up with the SARG regarding the invitation, but he was not hopeful.

SAUDI NONPARTICIPATION IN BSWG

¶8. (C) Abbawi raised Saudi nonparticipation in the October 21-22 Border Security Technical Experts meeting in Kuwait as an indicator of their continued cold attitude towards this working group. Saudi Arabia did attend the Neighbors Interior Ministers meeting in Kuwait October 23, but refused to allow the results of the technical experts meeting to be placed on the agenda. Abbawi seeks U.S. help in convincing the Saudis to participate in the Border Security Working Group. NOTE: Saudi Arabia also failed to participate in the initial Border Security Working Group meeting in Damascus August 8-9. END NOTE.

¶9. (C) COMMENT: Post requests that the USG seek assurances from the Saudi government that they will attend the next Border Security Working Group meeting expected to be hosted in Damascus. END COMMENT.

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